

8 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Direct *Xpress* process engaged the public from project initiation to completion. Multiple different outreach techniques were used to ensure that the public's priorities were understood prior to developing recommendations. In addition, after initial recommendations were developed, an outreach process was launched to ensure that existing and potential users could identify areas for improvement. The recommendations from Direct *Xpress* reflect community values.

As shown in Figure 8-1, a variety of public outreach activities were conducted as part of the Direct *Xpress* study. Outreach activities included Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings, stakeholder meetings, open houses, driver interviews, on-board survey efforts, and online survey results, among other activities. This chapter summarizes these outreach activities.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consisted of key transportation partners, which included technical transportation staff from local metro governments as well as regional and state transportation agencies. The role of the TAC was to collaborate with GRTA to exchange technical resources that support consistency with respective agency policies/initiatives, provide technical guidance at key study milestones, and offer feedback on the draft recommendations. Four different meetings were held with the TAC.

- The May 2014 meeting introduced Direct *Xpress*, and the project team and asked for feedback on priorities.
- The November 2014 meeting summarized findings of the existing conditions, including ridership, on-time performance, and the on-board survey. The results of the travel demand analysis were also presented, and initial service planning concepts were also introduced.
- In March 2015, the meeting described the findings of the household telephone survey, showed refined short-range recommendations, and introduced draft long-range recommendations.
- In May 2015, the TAC had the opportunity to comment on fare policy, as well as the phased recommendations. The results of the early May public outreach process were also summarized.

Figure 8-1 Public Outreach Summary

	TAC Meeting	Board Meeting	Public/ Customer Survey	Open House	Stakeholder Outreach	Stakeholder Group(s)
2014	Jan	○	◆	●	■	
	Feb					
	Mar		◆			
	Apr			●*		
	May	○				
	June		◆			
	Jul					■ ■ Perimeter Focus Group, North Fulton Focus Group
	Aug		◆			
	Sept					■ ■ MARTA, Rockdale Co BOC
	Oct		◆			■ ■ ■ Coweta Co BOC, City of Atlanta, GCT/CCT
	Nov	○		●**		■ ■ ■ Buckhead CID, Cherokee Co BOC, Atlanta RTC
	Dec		◆			
2015	Jan		● †			GRTA Operators, Perimeter CID/PTSC, TC, CAP, MA
	Feb		◆			
	Mar	○	◆			■ ■ Agency Heads, Perimeter Coordination
	Apr		◆			■ Airport
	May	○	◆	● †	■ ■ ■	■ ■ Airport, Atlanta Downtown Improvement District
	Jun		◆		■	■ GA Commute Options, Operators
	Jul					
	Aug		◆			
	Sep					
	Oct					
	Nov					
	Dec					

*On-Board Customer Survey ** Non-Rider Survey † Online Survey HT Options ‡ Online Survey HT Summaries

GRTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS BRIEFINGS

Eleven presentations were made to the GRTA Board over the course of the study to provide updates on study progress and findings. Topics discussed include the following:

- **March 2014** – General overview and description of the Direct *Xpress* study.
- **June 2014** – General update of the Direct *Xpress* study, including an analysis of the system’s existing conditions and on-board customer survey.
- **August 2014** – A general overview of potential future standards that could be applied to GRTA *Xpress* services.
- **October 2014** – Presentation describing “quick wins” or shorter-term service improvements that could be implemented to improve current service and to serve demand in new markets.
- **December 2014** – Presentation describing preliminary short-term recommendations for *Xpress*.
- **February 2015** – An update on project status, including recommendations themes and the online survey.
- **March 2015** – Presentation describing revised short and long-term recommendations and analysis of potential future markets.
- **April 2015** – Presentation describing the fare analysis and contract consolidation analysis.
- **May 2015** – Presentation describing adjusted short and long-term recommendations.
- **June 2015** – Presentation describing final short and long-term recommendations.
- **August 2015** – Presentation given to the GRTA Board by Deputy Executive Director and Chief Counsel Kirk Fjelstul describing final Direct *Xpress* recommendations.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted in July 2014 in North Fulton and Perimeter Center with 17 employers, municipalities, and local agencies. The collaborative part of the focus group involved facilitated discussion and input structured around a series of targeted questions concerning mobility and connectivity issues. Emphasis was placed on how GRTA *Xpress* could address these issues. The session also included an opportunity to address various travel concerns, locations, markets, and needs that might influence and support *Xpress* services.

Focus group participants generated numerous ideas about how to improve transit services in the North Fulton area, as well as specific improvement strategies for *Xpress*. The major themes and findings from the focus group to serve as input into Direct *Xpress* and help define recommendations for service improvements are outlined in this section.

Strategies to Improve *Xpress* in Perimeter

- **Improve Access from Cobb and Gwinnett Counties.** There is currently no transit service from either Cobb or Gwinnett Counties, and there is a need to connect these regions to Perimeter.
- **Sandy Springs or Dunwoody MARTA Stations have more first/last mile connectivity options than the North Springs MARTA Station.** Providing *Xpress*

service to one or more of the Perimeter MARTA rail stations, rather than (or in addition to) the current stop at the North Springs Station would reduce the number of transfers Perimeter riders would need to make and provide access at stations with land uses more conducive to transit service and walkability. The North Springs Station is not within walking distance of as many activity centers and serves mostly as a park-and-ride station for those who need to ride the rail further south.

- **Opportunities exist to take advantage of Perimeter employer shuttles to provide connections and first/last mile connectivity for *Xpress* riders.** Multiple employers in Perimeter Center currently provide private shuttles for their employees to local MARTA rail stations. Currently, there are 12 shuttles in place that connect to one or more of the three MARTA rail stations in Perimeter Center. During the focus group, participants mentioned that coordination between the shuttles and GRTA *Xpress* routes would benefit riders and reduce transfer wait times.
- ***Xpress* service could draw more trips from shift workers if service hours are extended.** There is a large concentration of medical workers at multiple hospitals in the area. Participants discussed how these workers are often working shift schedules that do not align with *Xpress* peak hour service. Expanding service hours would allow these employees to commute to and from work, even if they are working an 8 or 12-hour shift.
- **Multiple stops in Perimeter for *Xpress* routes could expand access.** Participants discussed the possibility of GRTA *Xpress* routes having multiple stops in Perimeter Center to increase stop options for commuters and reduce walking or shuttling needs to reach their final destination.

Strategies to Improve *Xpress* in North Fulton

- **Add a stop on the *Xpress* Route 400 in Alpharetta to improve North Fulton access to current GRTA services.** The GRTA *Xpress* Route 400 provides daily access from a park-and-ride lot in Cumming to the North Springs MARTA Station and Downtown Atlanta. If there were a stop/access point in Alpharetta, North Fulton commuters from Cumming would have an alternative travel option and North Fulton residents would be able to commute from a park-and-ride into Downtown Atlanta on a one-seat ride.
- **Work with local employers to provide shuttles to close first/last mile connectivity gaps surrounding *Xpress* stops.** Employment throughout the North Fulton area is significant, but it is also spread throughout the area. This has fostered an auto-oriented development pattern of shopping centers and employment campuses. To make *Xpress* commuter bus service successful in providing connections to employers in North Fulton, supportive infrastructure such as sidewalks are needed for improved pedestrian access and shuttles to extend the catchment area surrounding any GRTA *Xpress* stops.
- **Expand services hours for *Xpress* Route 408 to draw more trips throughout the day.** Expanding service hours on this route to provide more consistent service throughout the day would increase accessibility along the busy corridor.
- ***Xpress* Route 408 could be easier to access if some stops locations were adjusted.** Similarly, along the GRTA *Xpress* Route 408, focus group participants noted that riders were walking long distances to reach the nearest stop. Development has

occurred along the corridor at many locations between GRTA *Xpress* stops and an adjustment in stop locations could result in shorter walk distances for riders and increase accessibility.

- **Current *Xpress* service hours are not conducive for shift workers.** The Northside Hospital representative noted that while long-haul commuter bus service would benefit their employees and allow them to take advantage of reduced transit rates through the hospital, the peak hour service is not conducive for workers on eight or twelve hours shifts. Expanded service hours would allow the GRTA *Xpress* to be an option for more workers in the region.

ADDITIONAL AGENCY / STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

Multiple agencies were updated on the progress of Direct *Xpress* throughout the process, including operators, municipalities, CIDs, and representatives from major activity centers.

- **Operating Agencies** – MARTA, GCT, and CCT were all part of the TAC. Follow-up meetings and individual meetings were held with each agency to allow for complete understanding of market conditions and input on prospective recommendations.
- **CIDs/Major Employment Areas** – To understand needs and potential transportation solutions from an employment base area, the Direct *Xpress* team met with representatives including Buckhead, Perimeter, Airport, and the Downtown Atlanta Improvement District.
- **Other Representatives** – Elected officials and other key stakeholders were briefed on the progress of Direct *Xpress* and asked for input. The Direct *Xpress* team briefed the Board of Commissioners from Rockdale, Coweta, and Cherokee Counties. The team also met several times with City of Atlanta staff to discuss potential and refined recommendations.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Initial public outreach was conducted to understand both rider and non-rider needs before recommendations were developed. These are described in Chapters 4 and 5. This section describes public outreach efforts after recommendations were developed.

Online Surveys

Initial Alternatives Survey

Initial short-term recommendations were presented to the public in January and February 2015. An online survey of the initial recommendations was developed to see how existing customers felt about the proposed short-term recommendations.

The online survey received more than 4,500 responses and more than 8,000 written comments. Every route received comments—both positive and negative.

Most respondents were existing riders with defined trip routines—few responses were received from non-riders. Several themes emerged from the survey, including positive responses to improved frequency and increased span of service. However, respondents were sensitive to changes in travel time, were hesitant to walk further in Downtown due to both distance and safety

concerns and had perceptions of potential capacity problems on some routes. Many respondents were also concerned about travel times on their routes increasing due to additional stops.

Preferred Alternative Online Survey

The Initial Alternatives Survey results were utilized to make adjustments to the recommendations. More than half the routes had an adjusted recommendation as a result of survey responses. The adjusted recommendations were presented to the public in May 2015.

A new on-line survey was developed to show changes and allow for public comment. This survey received 627 responses. Many of the response themes were consistent with the initial survey. The biggest theme was the hesitancy to walk further in Downtown due to both distance and safety concerns.

Public Meetings

In May 2015, the Preferred Alternative recommendations were presented to the public in a series of public meetings. The public meetings were conducted in Midtown, North Downtown and South Downtown. More than 200 people attended the meetings, and over 600 additional customer comments were collected. As a result of the outreach and the desire to reach out to a large constituency, a fourth public meeting was scheduled at the Federal buildings. Approximately 150 people also attended this meeting.

Comments received at the public meetings were generally consistent with those received in the online survey. Major concerns expressed during the public meetings included Downtown safety, walk distances in Downtown, trip times, route consolidation, and confusion regarding fares. One of the results of the public meetings was a close look at different options for South Corridor routes to operate closer to the Federal Buildings so that walk distances are reduced.